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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1672

INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNRAO/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0343

RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHHRAN PRIORITY 0246

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001339

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SA YE

SUBJECT: MFA ON SYRIA, IRAQ, YEMEN, UAE AND PALESTINE

REF: A. RIYADH 1303

1B. ABU DHABI 849

1C. SECSTATE 97443

RIYADH 00001339 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) In an Oct 3 meeting, MFA Arab League Department Director, Ambassador Talal Maliki, confirmed that King Abdullah's upcoming trip to Damascus would occur after a Lebanese cabinet was agreed upon, and also confirmed that Information Minister Abdulaziz Khoja recently visited Beirut.

(NOTE: King Abdullah arrived in Damascus on Oct 7. End Note.) Maliki also expressed guarded optimism about Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki's willingness to form a cross-sectarian coalition; stressed the importance of economic development in southern Yemen; downplayed concerns of a Saudi-UAE rift; and lamented the lack of tangible results generated by Saudi financial aid to the Palestinians.

SYRIA - NEW SYRIAN AMBASSADOR TO RIYADH,
BUT KING'S VISIT STILL "IN ARRANGEMENTS"

12. (C) Maliki was tight lipped about the King's upcoming visit to Damascus, saying only that it was "in arrangements" and would likely not happen until a Lebanese government was agreed upon and the Saudis saw evidence that Syria was using its influence over Hamas to encourage Palestinian reconciliation. Maliki confirmed that Information Minister Abdulaziz Khoja had recently traveled to Beirut, adding that he could "perhaps visit Syria" in the near future. He had no concrete information about the contents of a letter passed to King Abdullah from Syrian information minister Mohsen Bilal (Ref A), but suggested that it could have been a formal invite to the King, or simply more information about the actions President Asad had taken in response to King Abdullah's requests vis--vis Lebanon and the Palestinians. In addition, Maliki confirmed that Syria had named former Syrian Information Minister Mahdi Dakhllallah as its new Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, adding that Dakhllallah had not yet presented his credentials to FM Saud or King Abdullah but was expected to within the next few weeks.

IRAQ - NO AMBASSADOR UNTIL WE SEE REAL RESULTS

13. (C) During a discussion regarding Saudi Arabia's views towards the upcoming Iraqi elections (per Ref C), Maliki

seemed genuinely upbeat about Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's recent announcement that he would seek to build a cross-sectarian coalition with greater Sunni representation, adding that if this came to pass it could lead to improvements in Saudi-Iraqi relations. However, he cautioned that PM al-Maliki had made such promises before, and that they had come to nothing. He lamented PM al-Maliki's close ties to the Iranians, but reiterated that the current announcement of coalition building was a positive sign. When asked if we could expect to see any shifts in Saudi policy that would encourage PM al-Maliki to continue on his current path, such as sending an Ambassador to Iraq, he replied that this was "too far" and that they were not likely to make any moves until they saw real results from PM al-Maliki. When Poloff noted recent improvements in the Iraqi security situation, Maliki predictably cited the recent bombings of the Iraqi MFA as evidence of continued instability and suggested that the SAG might not be represented in Iraq until they saw "one hundred percent stability."

YEMEN - CONTINUED SUPPORT

¶4. (C) While unable to confirm whether UNHCR had been allowed to begin its planned cross-border humanitarian assistance for Yemeni refugees, Maliki assured Poloff that the SAG "continues to support Yemen" and would do so in the future. He seemed more concerned about the general need for improved development efforts in the south of Yemen, saying that the GOY was "crazy not to" allow for more development funding in the south. Maliki also cautioned that things in Yemen could "get messy" if Iranian intervention was allowed.

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UAE - "A LIGHT PROBLEM"

¶5. (C) When asked whether the recent identity card dispute with the UAE (Ref B) was tied to any larger issue, Maliki brushed these concerns away saying that it was, "only a light problem," that would, "be solved later." He surmised that the only issue was the picture of a map on the card, but added that there were still disagreements about the future location of the GCC central bank. Maliki downplayed media reports of a more serious dispute with the UAE, and repeatedly referred to disagreements between the two countries as "only a light problem."

PALESTINE - "MONEY DOESN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM"

¶6. (C) Maliki agreed that Palestinian reconciliation was an integral part of achieving Middle East peace, but expressed frustration with the stalled state of affairs. When Poloff mentioned recent PA progress and positively noted Saudi Arabia's most recent contributions to the PA budget, Maliki replied that, "money doesn't solve the problem." He went on to lament that the SAG continued to provide financial assistance to the Palestinians, "but nothing has come of it."

SMITH